



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

CHARITY AND PROGRESS.*

MORE than two thousand years ago Plato warned his countrymen, in strangely modern phrase, against the physical, moral, and political degradation in store for any nation which perpetuated the unfit and allowed its citizens to breed from weak and enervated stock. So eager was he to shock his contemporaries into a realization of the dangers of degeneration and the necessity of artificial selection, that he sketched for them the startling outlines of an imaginary Republic, in which no considerations of property, no bonds of family life, no sentiment of pity, was allowed to stand in the way of that elimination of weakness and that perfection of the race which he conceived to be the indispensable basis of progressive civilization.

To-day evolutionist philosophers are dinning the same message in our ears. Behold, they say, the paradox of progress! Civilization destroys itself, puts the knife to its own throat, perishes by its own hand, or rather dies miserably of the slow poison of its own virtues. For the growth of civilization is but a name for the growth of sympathy. The fruits of sympathy are philanthropy, charity, sanitation, medical science, all that makes against the sufferings of our race. These, again, are but methods of protecting the weak, perpetuating the unfit, reversing the law of progress, destroying civilization and sympathy itself. Like Plato of old, the evolutionists complain loudly that man sees clearly enough what the law of progress is for the brute creation, but chooses to regard himself as an exception. Like him, they insist that there is absolutely no ground for this infatuation and mystery

*An address delivered at The National Conference of Unitarian and Other Christian Churches, Saratoga, New York, September, 1897.

with which man affects to surround the evolution of his own species. The same law applies to him as to the beasts that perish,—the simple, inevitable, universal law of selection and survival which biology has already formulated for other animals. Selection, however, implies two things: it implies something selected, and no less surely something rejected, left behind to perish as unfit. Hence, as a recent English writer reiterates, in a *reductio ad absurdum* which seems to render refutation superfluous, there can be no real progress for a society which is not improvident enough to multiply more rapidly than subsistence and environment will warrant. There is nothing but decay in store for any society which is not crowding unfit members to the wall, which has not its “submerged tenth” sinking inevitably beneath the waves of poverty and competition. Improvidence, weakness, degradation, and suffering are with you always, because, forsooth, they are the signs of health, the growing-pains of progress.

How, then, we are asked, can modern society escape speedy degeneration? Philanthropy is present in the world on a new and gigantic scale. Every day civilization finds it harder to see the weak pushed to the wall. Philanthropy deals a twofold blow at progress. It not only perpetuates the weak: the essence of it is self-sacrifice of the strong to the weak. Thus the law of progress is reversed. Even science has joined the forces of degeneration. The deadly microbes of fever and contagious disease, which have been such efficient allies in the work of rejecting the weak, are being banished from the earth. All that the best intellect, the most patient ingenuity, the most unselfish devotion, can devise, is being used to preserve the weak, and enable him to transmit his weakness to future generations. Already the fatal consequences are but too plainly visible on every hand. Insane asylums, homes for defectives, prisons, reformatories, hospitals, shelters, wood-yards, soup depots, the whole

directory full of charitable activities of every sort, testify that the process of degeneration is well under way. As for remedies, the pessimistic aver there is no remedy, and abandon themselves to the luxury of disordered fancies and delirious exaggerations of impending ills. The optimistic join in Plato's plea for conscious effort to improve the race by breeding from the best stock, and by educating public opinion to the exercise of an enlightened, scientific sympathy, which shall refrain from evil-doing. For the unfit must either cease to be produced or cease to reproduce.

While this first group of philosophers are thus wringing their hands over the pathetic dilemma of progress, and lamenting that the sympathy which man has cherished in his bosom has warmed into a viper with a deadly sting, we are suddenly relieved to hear another confident and dogmatic voice from the evolutionary ranks, bidding them be of good cheer, for they are quite mistaken in their diagnosis of the case. Let no one worry over an illusory dilemma, or the alleged discomfiture of natural selection by sympathy and altruism. Natural selection is quite able to take care of itself. Neither philanthropy nor any other creature can interfere with the cosmic determinism which has ordained the law. Far from being an enemy, philanthropy is but the handmaid of selection, in disguise. Or, to be exact, philanthropy is the second handmaid; for religion is the first. Those have been deceived who thought they saw in religion and her philanthropic offspring a palliation of the struggle for life, a tendency to mitigate the ruthless rejection of the weak, a humanizing of those processes of natural selection and survival of the strong which are popularly called competition, a gospel of love and fraternity which should replace the gospel of strife. Religion is merely a part of the machinery of rejection,—a useful variation, by virtue of which a religious group, or civilization, surpasses a non-religious or less religious group, or civilization. Be-

cause it mitigates the relentless struggle for life, do you ask? Quite the contrary. Because it makes possible a higher intensity of that struggle; because it enables the more religious society to bear the pains of rejection and extermination with greater fortitude; because it consoles the rejected of this world with the hope of happiness in the next; because it comforts the wounded and the dying with the anæsthetic of a future life, in which those who have lost father, mother, husband, children, lands, or wages, shall have them restored a hundred-fold; because it thus enables society to breed from the strongest, hardest of its stock. Religion make the march of progress and the struggle for life less severe? Religion an enemy to natural selection? Nay, rather, it is religion which makes the forced march of modern progress possible. But for religious anæsthetics the rank and file of those who toil and suffer would be driven in desperation to join a socialistic mutiny, the march would be stopped, and some other more religious civilization would go to the front.

In like manner we are asked to believe that the second handmaid, philanthropy, only continues the good work by increasing the range and intensity of the struggle. The real significance of modern philanthropy is the gradual substitution of equality of opportunity for old inequalities based upon class distinctions, birth, and wealth. Philanthropy is the voluntary abdication of privilege, the willing self-sacrifice of those who have hitherto been doubly protected from the rigors of competitive rejection,—by the barriers of privilege, on the one hand, and by the disabilities of the masses, on the other. Instead of angels of deliverance and mercy, religion and philanthropy are but furies in disguise, drugging the senses with ultra-rational sanctions for an irrational struggle, and distributing among the poor the shining weapons of a more equal opportunity, in order that the fight may be fiercer and more universal, and the weaker, both of themselves and of their benefactors, sooner slain.

Therefore, instead of liberty, equality, and fraternity, write on the banners of progress this glorious motto, liberty, equality, and natural selection. Grieve not at this slight biologic emendation. Man would be less a part of the cosmic mystery and dispensation if it could be otherwise. For man as an individual, nature can care nothing. Like all other individuals, he must be mercilessly sacrificed to the interest of the abstraction called the species. The species and the social organism which develops it must be preserved at any cost, and the only law of development which nature recognizes is natural selection. In a word, progress is natural selection and rejection; religion is the handmaid of natural selection; philanthropy is the handmaid of religion. Know, therefore, ministers of philanthropy and religion, that you are co-workers together with Nature, with a big N, in the grewsome task of eliminating the unfit. The future offers you great possibilities of usefulness,—an ever-fiercer struggle for life, an ever-increasing religious and philanthropic organization, an ever-larger hospital corps, an ever-growing red cross division in the army of progress.

And so the fight goes merrily on, and some ministers of the gospel of peace and humanity of late have taken courage, because, forsooth, some sage assures them that no nation has prospered or can prosper without this religion, that there is no danger that with the progress of civilization religion will decay; for religion is the ultra-rational sanction for a process of rejection which is as essential to progress as it is unjustifiable to the individual on any rational grounds. And they have even recommended this teaching as a cure for the scepticism of those of faltering faith among their flocks.

Such, then, are two of the conflicting accounts which men who speak as having the authority of science give of the function of philanthropy in progress. To one party it is the symptom of decay, the evidence that the dilemma

of progress has been reached, that the cycle of civilization is completing itself. Charity means survival of the unfit, sacrifice of the strong to the weak, the gradual deterioration of society. First, "from hour to hour we ripe and ripe"; and philanthropy is the over-ripe fruit of a decaying civilization. To the other party the growth of philanthropy but indicates the more rapid march of progress, the intenser struggle for life, the greater need of hospitals and nurses and chaplains to care for the wounded and the dying. The former makes religion and philanthropy the enemy of progress: the latter reconciles them by making progress not worth having.

Which is right? Neither. Yet truth lies between two falsehoods. The golden mean shades into the dark extremes. In a sense, therefore, we may truly say that both these pictures are true to philanthropy as it is, that neither of them is true of philanthropy as it ought to be. Sometimes we may rejoice that doctors disagree, especially if the diagnoses are very bad. It leaves us free to use our more optimistic common sense.

What, then, are some of the practical aspects of philanthropy which lend the color of truth to these diametrically opposing views? In the words of the subject you have formulated for me, what are some of the false methods which are hindrances to social betterment?

First, let us consider two conspicuous hindrances to progress with which the practical worker has constantly to deal, — lack of organization and excess of organization. Lack of organization means inefficiency, absence of co-operation, waste of individual effort. It leads to the survival of the unfit, the impostor, the hypocrite, the parasite, the helpless, the lazy, the pauper, the mean man. Excess of organization means rigidity, uniformity, routine, mechanical perfection, degenerating finally to automatic machine methods, which tend to produce the very evils they were

designed to cure. There is nothing strange or novel in this paradox. In politics we have already learned by bitter experience the difference between the legitimate organization and the so-called "machine." There is profound wisdom in the popular distinction between the two. Organization is the instrument of reform, the method of intelligent co-operation for public good. The "machine" is the weapon of corruption, the enemy of reform, the means of subverting the public welfare to unintelligent or selfish ends. Organization must often be perfected, strengthened, elaborated, to the end that the "machine" may be wrested from the enemy's hands, remodelled, and turned to useful work, or smashed. A large part of the cost and waste of progress is to be found in this struggle of the new organization with the old machine, in the reformation of existing agencies, in the destruction of what cannot be redeemed. This is the meaning of the word "reform." But, strange to say, just when the victory is won, the organization which has served its end so well, tends itself to become a machine; and the work of reform begins anew.

I cannot and need not pause here to pay tribute to the splendid work of Associated Charities, or other voluntary forms of charity organization in our own and other countries, or to urge the social suicide of failure to push forward in such work. I venture only in the brief time allotted me to assume the thankless rôle of critic, and suggest the dangers of excess. If I read the facts aright, the comparative student of philanthropic work and workers cannot fail to be impressed and depressed by the predominant importance which American charity organizers seem to attach to the elaboration of the great, automatic, imposture-detecting, charity-dispensing machinery. Charity organization cannot safely attempt to make charity a machine industry. It is the testimony of some of those who have had longest and most varied experience that

elaborate book-keeping, checks and counter-checks, become of less importance as the charity work becomes really earnest, efficient, personal. "If you really mean to take hold of a person and save him," said a well-known authority to me recently, "it isn't so much matter about the records of what he has or has not done in the past. I confess I often fail to look up my index till after I have embarked on the case. It is the hard, earnest, individual labor that counts; and, if that is really undertaken at all, the visitor in charge of the case is bound to get at the bottom facts better than any one else can." Not to keep books, to collect and dispense money, and to detect fraud, but to inspire citizens to become "visitors" and undertake this "hard, earnest, individual labor," is the function of organized charity. Not to replace, but to increase, individual effort is the aim.

An illustration of the allurements, the benefits, the possible dangers, of machine organization is, to be found in the "pool system,"—the system by which all the recognized charities of a locality issue a joint appeal to all the subscribers, and then divide the proceeds on a prearranged scale. This is simplicity itself for the giver. One entry in his account book suffices for all,—Charity, 1897, fifty dollars. It is the "penny in the slot" machine applied. The poor you still have with you always, but the collector only once a year. What a relief! You need be charitable but once a year. By this annual or periodic benevolence you contribute to a pool of Bethesda whose healing waters shall be troubled to order whenever an unfortunate approaches the bank; to a reservoir of mercy whence benevolence shall be piped to every quarter of the city; to be on tap at high pressure in every institution, and ready to flow at the touch of the official hand. The perfection of organization, it works like a fire department or an ambulance corps. Now some such machinery as this is the ideal of certain enthusiasts. True, these are

only tendencies, not necessary evils. In the hands of earnest, vigilant, and devoted men and women, such labor-saving machinery might do admirable work. But beware of anything which seems to teach people that charity consists in distributing money, or distributing anything short of themselves.

There is a second set of mechanical dangers, even more insidious and alluring, and almost universal in charitable organization the world over,—the dangers of having as figure-heads and directors of charitable and philanthropic enterprises people who do not really direct. There is a certain kind of begging letter with which the world of notables is very familiar,—a letter asking a certain person of influence to become titular head of a certain society, and at the same time carefully explaining that the official duties will be absolutely nil or nominal. A man ought to feel insulted by such a request. Public opinion must be educated till those who accept office in charitable or philanthropic work accept the responsibilities of office with the same standards of faithfulness that apply to commercial positions of trust and responsibility. If charity is to enjoy self-respect and the respect of the community, it must at least be business-like; but, unfortunately, it must be confessed that the standard of directoral responsibility and intelligence in business affairs is very low. “How is it,” said one of our great railway magnates to his confidential adviser, “that the president of yonder rival road always finds out our plans? How can we stop that leak?” “By making him one of your directors,” was the cynical reply. None the less, the public must get over wanting to have big names conspicuous in places where the owners of the names are conspicuous by their absence. The influential citizen must be educated to forego the gratification of the sense of importance which figure-heading brings. The director of everything is probably the director of nothing. He is only an advertisement of the ma-

chine, and a misleading advertisement at that. He draws subscriptions; and, when the day of reckoning comes, his reputation is often used to whitewash things that will not wash in any other way.

It is, therefore, a matter of congratulation that the wisest organizers have recognized these evils, and are turning their attention more and more towards preventive educational work: education and training of workers; education of the general giving public; education of congenital philanthropists with perennial crops of new schemes to be supported; education, if possible, of law-makers and officials. To this end, literature, lecture courses, and other means of enlightenment and training must play a constantly increasing part in the organized philanthropy of the future. On the other hand, one of the most difficult and most important educational functions which an association can assume is that of habitual expert inquiry and investigation in regard to existing or proposed philanthropic agencies. As the programme of a voluntary unofficial organization, this work of inquiry and censorship is always beset with grave difficulties at the start. Such inquiries at first meet with persistent snubs from institutions and officials. Snubbing, however, has the good effect of making the inquirer careful, accurate, and correspondingly influential in the long run. Experience shows clearly that the opinion of such a body of candid experts gains greater and greater weight with the contributors upon whom the various organizations depend. An altruistic system of blackmail in the interests of virtue has something to commend it.

Such frank and fearless watchfulness and helpfulness is one of the great needs of every well-endowed community, and a need which increases with time. There is scarcely a community of any age and size in which there are not institutions which have outlived their usefulness, failed to do their duty, misappropriated their collections, turned

into machines, actually done harm, and to just that extent justified the evolutionary strictures which, I said, were partly true. Frank, fearless, constructive, and destructive criticism of official and unofficial charity by a body of men and women whose power is the power of intelligence, disinterestedness, accuracy, mutual confidence and support,—this alone can prevent institutions from outliving their usefulness, organizations from becoming machines, endowments and revenues from producing the unfit. This alone can prevent the sympathetic public from putting its faith and its money in wasteful and worthless enterprises which demoralize those who give and those who receive. It is this alone which could tell the bewildered subscriber whether he might safely contribute to such or such a philanthropic pool.

Think not that I exaggerate the necessity for such critical education. That were not an easy thing to do in these credulous days. The age of miracles is past, we are told; but not the age of believing in them. In plain English the public still likes to be philanthropically humbugged and gulled, still sets a premium on charlatanism. Who does not know that, if you come to the people with a scheme which may, under favorable circumstances, promise success of some moderate sort, they will have nothing to do with such a half-hearted affair? Hearts, minds, and purses shut with an audible snap. If, on the other hand, you come forward with some impossible scheme of universal regeneration, there is no end to the money and enthusiasm your plans may evoke. This is why, to the shame of many an intelligent community, scientific charity often receives such meagre and grudging support. This is the explanation of the extraordinary support to be obtained for sensational and extravagant enterprises in our day. It is just because of the audacity of their plans and pretensions. When you have the statistics of salvation and regeneration all before you; when you can be assured posi-

tively that five-and-twenty dollars is the average cost of saving a lost soul, of regenerating a fellow-being, of rescuing a brand from the eternal burning,—how can you refuse to redeem souls at such fabulously low figures? Such an arrangement has all the attraction of a bargain counter; and the modest pretensions of hard-working reformers, who do not deal in the market quotations of human souls, who promise no miraculously cheap bargains slightly damaged by fire, obviously do not attract the bargain-hunting world. Even those blind givers who delight in the titular patronage of good works of which they know next to nothing, who are in no danger of the sin of letting the right hand know what the left is doing, for the simple reason that they could not tell if they tried,—even these kindly and ostentatious souls sometimes object to being rescued from the clutches of visionaries and impostors by the detective work of charity experts. They find such frank undeceiving a sad contrast to the adulation of reckless or visionary or fraudulent promoters of seductive schemes for the alleged regeneration of mankind in general. Surely, the economics of moral redemption call for drastic educational propaganda, which shall teach people to encourage sound enterprise, and not to court failure and encourage charlatanism by expecting or demanding the impossible. Miracles, like cheap bargains, will be in the market as long as there is an active, paying demand for them. A philanthropic consumers' league, with a white list of deserving enterprises, would be good for those who give and those who receive.

There is a vast difference between the machinery of organization and the organization of a machine. It is to be admitted, also, that, whatever we may think of machines in general, most of us have pathetic confidence in the efficacy of some new and untried invention. I had a friend who was one of the most loving and lovable of men. His hand was always open to the needy, his

heart was a healing spring of sympathy, his ear was keenly sensitive to tales of woe. But when the too frequent impostor had been detected, when he knew that his soul had been harrowed by a lie, that the bread of the suffering had been stolen and pawned by a cheat, his wrath waxed hot. On one of these occasions he recommended to me a mechanical device for the detection of virtue, and charged me as a sociologist to propagate its use. It was called *The Touchstone of Virtue, or the Combined Work Test and Hydropathic Cure*. It was simplicity itself. It consisted of a deep covered vat, or tank, with appliances for turning on a definite supply of water. In the middle of the vat stood a hand pump, capable, when diligently exercised, of expelling the water as fast as it flowed in. On the wall was an illuminated Scripture motto,—“*He that will not work, neither shall he eat.*” The applicant for charity was first medically examined, to see if he were strong enough to work. He was then lowered into the vat, the cover was adjusted, the water turned on, and the patient left to pump out his own salvation. Two hours later the cover was removed; and the cook or the coroner notified, as the case might require.

Charity has not yet got beyond the need of some such tank or vat. It is an indispensable adjunct to the philanthropic pool of Bethesda, already described. In all earnestness I advocate its use. Hear, therefore, the interpretation of the parable.

The tank is a workhouse, run on a reformatory plan, with an indeterminate sentence and every known device for detecting germs of virtue and stimulating its growth,—to the end that the prisoner may be reformed and become fit to re-enter society and set free from the bonds of his own vices. The pump is the gospel of work, of opportunity, self-help, and temperance. There are two exits from these tanks. The one is called improvement, and

stands forever open. The other is death. The medical examination is the separation of the weak and incapable, that the utmost may be done for them in hospitals, homes for incurables, asylums, or retreats for feeble-minded. Within the walls of these tanks is no marrying or giving in marriage, or breeding of the unfit. They are the philanthropic monasteries and nunneries of the twentieth century,—that our maxim may be fulfilled, and the unfit either cease to be produced or cease to reproduce. And the life of the celibates within shall be better than their old life of liberty, which is thralldom to sin; for they are delivered from the mastery of their lower selves, their steps are turned towards the open door of improvement and the road of restoration. Within is no drunkenness, no licentious debauch, no trampling on the sacred right of the next generation to be well born. Before the gates of this reformatory, along the upward and the downward path, are the organizations of scientific charity, giving comfort, help, encouragement, and temporary refuge to the discouraged men and women who are on the downward road of degeneration to the tank or toiling on the upward way of restoration.

Thus shall the hereditary burden of pauperism, disease, and crime grow less, and not greater, from generation to generation. The tramp shall cease to be a burden, the unemployed shall be fewer in the land, and charity shall injure no one whom it tries to help. But the struggle for the higher and yet higher life will still go on. The relatively weaker and unfit will still need the self-sacrifice of the wisest and the gentlest helpfulness. The hospital, the reformatory, the machine, may not utterly cease from the land; for to human progress we happily can see no end, and there is no forwards without a backwards, no higher without a lower, no up without a down.

Thus is the real paradox solved, the sacrifice of the strong to the weak reconciled with progress, because

intelligent self-sacrifice of the strong to the weak makes the strong stronger and the weak more strong. To him that hath the capacity to receive shall be given the priceless boon of opportunity, and from him that hath not shall be taken away the power of degrading himself and society. The philanthropy of the future will be wise as the serpent and gentle as the dove. With these two emblems conspicuous upon its banners, the motto liberty, equality, fraternity, may safely float above the lower alternative standard of liberty, equality, and natural selection. Here lies the golden mean we sought. The riddle of philanthropy and progress is answered, the hydra-headed sphinx of evolution satisfied.

EDWARD CUMMINGS.